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ABSTRACT

In 1981, Pikes Peak Community College initiated a new Continuing Education Area, which featured a "weekend college" for communication classes held on Friday evenings and Saturdays. Faculty and administrators have identified several advantages of the weekend college, including the following: (1) since classes are held in existing facilities, there is only a minimal additional financial outlay; (2) the weekend classes do not take students from weekday classes, rather they add additional students to the total enrollment; (3) the weekend schedule can provide for the special needs of regularly enrolled students; (4) weekend scheduling allows for flexibility in the assignment of full- and part-time instructors; and (5) necessary auxiliary materials and audio-visual equipment are readily available. Some basic guidelines have been developed to help both faculty and students, which include varying the instructional approach at least every 2 hours; scheduling assignments carefully for the optimum use of time; preparing a course content schedule that is divided into 1- to 3-hour blocks to help gauge time accurately; and allowing students to take part in decisions that affect the class. The major problem in implementing a weekend program involves recruiting students who are not in close contact with the campus, but this can be overcome through radio spots, newspaper advertising, and promotional posters. (HB)

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Communication on the Weekends:

One Cost Saving, Energy Saving, People Saving Idea

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by

Lois Twombley Kline

Pikes Peak Community College

Colorado Springs, CO

JC 840 162

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Communication on the Weekends

Pikes Peak Community College is a state-supported community college in Colorado Springs, Colorado. It has approximately five thousand full-time equivalent students, with an actual head-count of almost seven thousand. Of these enrollees, sixty percent are "majoring" in occupational related subjects, and forty percent are in the arts and sciences. The occupational divisions within the college include Business and Office Occupations, Technical Occupations, Industrial Occupations, and Community and Health Service Occupations. The arts and sciences divisions include Communications and Humanities, Social Sciences, Math and Science, and Developmental Studies. Communication is placed in the Communications and Humanities Division and serves primarily as a support program for many of the occupational certificate and degree programs.

In 1981, Pikes Peak Community College implemented a new Continuing Education Area in the college. At that time, Continuing Education classes were defined as any courses offered through the college, but at a time, at a place, or including content that was unique. Examples included non-credit classes offered in the local public schools, credit classes offered in the local schools and on-site at businesses and institutions, and campus classes that were scheduled between five o'clock Friday evening and eight o'clock Monday morning. The term coined for this last group of classes was the "Weekend College," and the communication program was a part of it. Communication faculty who wish to propose a similar program may be able to use the following information about advantages, adaptation of coursework, and marketing strategies for the classes.

ADVANTAGES

Administrative and instructional personnel at Pikes Peak Community College have identified five major advantages to a weekend schedule for the communication classes:

The first major advantage is a financial one; the classes are held in existing facilities that are fully scheduled during the regular week. If additional weekday classes were scheduled, the college would have to rent space. Weekend classes are held on campus, so the only additional cost is a minimal outlay for janitorial service and utilities. Campus Security officers are available on weekends anyway, and the number of Weekend College students is not great enough to require additional security personnel.

Second, the weekend classes do not "steal" students from weekday classes, but instead add additional students to the total enrollment. Most of the students who enroll in these classes have conflicts with regularly scheduled classes because of changing work schedules or some other kind of commitment. They can, however, attend classes on weekends, and they appreciate the opportunity to pick up college credits this way.

Next, for the students who are enrolled in regular weekday classes, the Weekend College provides for special needs. Transfer students often need to complete the whole communication program in a short time because many of their other requirements were transferred. All three of the courses of the sequence are offered in one quarter's time; therefore they can complete these required courses without attending for the full year. This compressed scheduling also accomodates the student who "put off the communication classes until the last minute" and finds that these three classes are all he/she needs to graduate at the end of the current quarter.

Fourth, the Division Directors find that the weekend scheduling allows them flexibility in scheduling their full-time and part-time instructors. If an instructor has problems with weekday scheduling because of research obligations or child care responsibilities, for example, the weekend classes provide a workable alternative.

The last advantage is an instructional-related one: Necessary auxiliary materials and audio-visual equipment are readily available. When teaching off-campus classes, it is often necessary to coordinate with a building supervisor in order to secure or operate equipment; or worse, to transport the equipment to the classroom for each session. Since weekend classes are held in the communication classrooms, arrangements can be made on Friday, and everything is ready to go when the class begins.

ADAPTATION OF COURSEWORK

Pikes Peak Community College operates on a quarter system, and the communication sequence includes three one-quarter classes: Interpersonal Communication, Basic Report Writing, and Presentational Speaking. In order to get all three classes completed in one quarter, each course takes three weekends. Because each class is three credit hours, thirty hours of instruction are required. The weekend schedule begins at six o'clock on Friday evening and continues until ten o'clock, then resumes at eight o'clock on Saturday morning and ends at three o'clock that afternoon. No Sunday sessions are scheduled. The instructors may schedule the ten-minute hourly breaks and the one-hour lunch break as they wish. Students should receive a copy of the syllabus at the time of registration so that they can complete any necessary reading before the first session.

Each of the courses includes three units of approximately equal length, so the obvious method of adaptation is to cover one unit each weekend. Although course content, organization, and approach may differ from college to college, some basic guidelines may help to make the weekend approach successful and pleasant fo both the students and the instructors:

1. Vary the instructional approach at least every two hours. Students cannot concentrate for a two or three hour lecture, and you as an instructor are bound to lose some of your enthusiasm. A typical morning or evening session may include: a basic lecture presenting key concepts and terms for the unit; a class activity that allows students to "try out" the new concept; an audio-visual presentation such as a film or a tape which illustrates the idea; small-group interaction for the purpose of clarifying or generating questions; class discussion to provide answers to the questions posed by the groups.

2. Schedule assignments carefully. It is not a good idea to assign a written assignment at the end of the Friday session; there simply is not enough time to complete it before eight o'clock on Saturday morning. The best assignment time is between the Saturday session and the next Friday session. Discussing the assignments also helps to provide a review of the past week's work and a transition to the new unit or concept. If a final paper is due, give the students a couple of days after the final session to turn it in; the papers will be much better, and the students will not experience as much tension.

   Test or quiz scheduling is also critical. Students will retain more of the information if they are required to complete a thoughtful open-book exam rather than a memory-based objective closed-book exam. Also, it is not a good idea to schedule a major exam on Saturday afternoon.

3. Prepare carefully. Most college instructors do not teach for five to eight hours straight and therefore may not be able to gauge the time accurately. It is a good idea to make up a content schedule that is divided into one to three-hour blocks. That way you can tell if you get too far behind and are in danger of completing the class time before you complete the class content (Very seldom does an instructor get too far ahead!).

4. As much as possible, allow students to take part in making decisions that affect the class. Each class will have its own "group personality" and will want to do things its own way. Ask them what kind of break schedule they would prefer; if they would like to bring sack lunches, continue class through that break, and get out an hour early in the evening; whether they prefer one or two major tests, or several shorter ones. Many aspects of conducting a weekend class are flexible, and by adjusting to the particular group of students, it is possible to get a close organizational and group "fit." The class will, as a result, be more productive and more enjoyable.

MARKETING STRATEGIES

The major problem posed in implementing a weekend program in the area of communication is reaching the potential students who do not have much contact with the campus. Some possibilities include: 1) Including the information about the new program with promotional radio spots already used by the college; 2) reating new radio spots which deal exclusively with Weekend College classes and schedules; 3) Printing whole or partial schedules in local newspapers and advertising publications; and 4) Posting promotional posters in grocery stores, hospitals, businesses, etc.

Reaching campus-based students is less of a challenge. Information about the new program can be included in the college newspaper, broadcast on the college radio or television stations, announced in classes, or even posted in the halls and on bulletin boards.

The Weekend College approach is both workable and advantageous. Most communication programs can be adapted to this format with minimal upset to the existing program. It is one example of a cost saving (and possibly even generating), energy saving, people saving idea.

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